

“Frontline Leadership: Development & Empowerment of Leaders at Every Level”

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AFGSC Global Strike Challenge

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CMSAF Cody: Let me kind of cap onto what the Sergeant Major said. It really is a privilege to be here. I'm really enjoying the opportunity yesterday and some of the breakouts, the dialogue, and we're really excited about the opportunity to dialogue with all of you this afternoon or this morning as it may be, but a lot going on in our Air Force and we have done a lot in the 67 years since we became a separate branch of service. And there's a lot to be proud of.

We kind of work forward and work through the challenges that our nation is facing, that we're engaged with globally. Then how do we continue to execute what you do for America and our partners around the world every day. It's important that we take some stock in ourselves. I think you have a very apropos theme for this conference. Empowerment, a bridge to the future and how we're going to do that.

I've had the opportunity since I've been in this position to travel around the entire globe and meet with airmen just about everywhere, and certain within this command, the great men and women that are serving and supported by their families.

Empowerment's not a real hard thing for us to do. We've been doing it for a long time. Maybe we don't even give ourselves credit for how much of it we do do, but it is important that we talk about it in the way that professionals can talk about it, and that's probably the fundamental difference when you think back 67 years ago, Sergeant Major, when you looked at the United States Air Force 67 years ago, and you really wouldn't have characterized it in the same way you would today in this context of a professional force. We certainly had professionals in the Air Force, but when I look at what 82 percent of our Air Force is today -- that's enlisted -- it was absolutely not a professional enlisted force in 1967. It just wasn't. It wasn't even designed to be as such and we didn't invest in developing our airmen in the way that we do today to ensure that level of professionalism. And once you transition into this professional force as we have over the decades, the expectations are different. The empowerment is different. The conversations are different.

CSM Alston: As the CMSAF said, we have about 1.4 million active duty members in our armed forces today. Eighty-three percent of those 1.4 million are enlisted troops. Seventeen percent are officers. Seventeen percent of those individuals that are in charge to make policy and procedures. But we, the 83 percent, are the ones that have to take out those policies and procedures and have to execute those missions.

So I'm going to tell you that the 83 percent, we must ensure that we are setting the right path for America's sons and daughters that are raising their hand, coming into the United States Armed Forces, coming to the United States Air Force. So I've got a question for you. When I decided to go United States Army, I went to the local recruiter. I walked in. The local recruiter said which

service do you want to go to? I said well those who are smart, they go to the Air Force. [Laughter]. My [GT] score is way too high to go to the Navy. I'm not really good at chemistry so I won't go to the Marine Corps. So I fit right into the Army. He said okay, great, sign here. Go to the next station. This is the person I got for you. When I got down to that next station I raised my hand and I gave that enlisted oath -- how many words did I say? Anybody know?

Voice: 72 words.

CSM Alston: I said 72 words, 74 words if I used my middle name and I have a hyphenated last name -- 73 words if I don't use my middle name. But the question is, what is the most profound word I said when I said those 72, 3, or 4 words?

Voice: Obey.

CSM Alston: Wait a minute, now. Hold it. I just left Whiteman so you're answering every question. You're messing my brief up here. You're not working with me.

So I said those words, and I said obey. Now why is obey important? Obey is important because we have to understand the nation that we are built on a foundation of following our leaders. And if we fail to obey then what we're doing is we're setting out nation up not to have the democracy we're enjoying every day. We're setting our loved ones up not to have the choices they enjoy each and every day. We're setting ourselves up not to live in strongest nation in the free world.

Now you may say obey is easy, but if obey is easy then why do we have people getting DUIs? Why do we have people getting pot on a urinalysis test? Why do we have people failing to show up to work on time? Why do we have people failing to do all the requirements and standards of their service?

See, a lot of times we look at that word obey, and we think we're only supposed to obey the leaders that's charged to lead us. But no, we're really supposed to have that self-drive, that self-determination to understand obey is taking the point of doing right when nobody's looking.

So I ask you, America's sons and daughters, Air Force Global Strike, part of the most powerful deterrence platform in the world, are you able to obey?

CMSAF Cody: Let's try to break that down a little bit in practical terms.

So blindly obeying anything people to tell you to do, that's not empowerment, right? That's not exactly what the Sergeant Major is getting at. It's we all do know what the right things to do are.

When we come into our Air Force, all of us, and this kind of goes to leadership and I think how we continue to evolve in this idea of leadership. What does leadership mean? What does it look like? And how do you lead and how do you follow in today's Air Force? And it does evolve over time

because society evolves, the generation of men and women that serve have evolved, and we really have to think about that.

When you look at our Air Force, when you look at our military today, largely directly in the military we have three generations of men and women serving together and some dramatically different views on things. Just about everything. Maybe even some dramatically different views on what obey means.

So certainly I think we're all bonded in this commitment to live by our core values. By its very nature it's the price of admission in our Air Force. And if you can't live to those core values, then there is no place for you in our United States Air Force. It's just that simple. It's the commitment up front and it's the commitment of continued service.

But there is this idea of [inaudible], there is this idea that you have to appreciate the men and women that are being led, you have to value them, you have to respect them, treating them with the appropriate dignity, and have conversations that professionals can have.

So the idea that you blindly obey -- Certainly when you're in the heat of combat you get the order, you go and you do. That's part of our core values, right? That is service before self. Right? Part of service before self is faith. Faith in your leadership, and to question those orders, those directions, is to say you know better.

So there's questions for education, understanding. Always appropriate amongst professionals. Always healthy dialogue. And then there's questioning the decisions of leaders. They're two different things.

We have to value each and every one of you as airmen and this ability to have dialogue, question what we're doing. This is how you move forward. You come up with the best solutions I had in that dialogue.

Questioning the decisions of the leadership of which you are here to obey their direction, that's a fundamental problem. That's a fundamental problem and you are not living with our core values if you're doing so.

And I go right back to it. It's the price of admission and it's the price to stay. If you aren't part of that, you're part of an all-volunteer force for the first time in the history of our country. That means you don't have to continue to volunteer. But if you're going to, you're going to abide by those core values. That's every single airman in the United States Air Force, regardless of your position in the Air Force.

But this level of respect and how we get after that, we have to remain committed to that. But I think as leaders, as professionals, we have to value each other for where we are and what we bring to the fight.

The idea that every generation that comes in, I promise you when the Command Sergeant Major and I came in and we raised our right hand, the previous generation was not speaking very fondly of us at [inaudible]. We just didn't get it. As every generation of service men and women that came before us kind of endured that. And the difference today is, if you're honest and say it out loud, and we had a couple of interactions yesterday in some of the breakouts, they're going to ask us why. Why doesn't mean they're questioning whether they'll do it or not. Why is because they just want to know why they're doing it. They're not saying they won't do it, they're not saying they can't do it, but they absolutely want to know why they're doing it. Whether it meets with their definition of the right thing to do or not. They'll do it.

That's hard and that's a struggle for folks like us who have been doing this for a long time, because while we never liked it when somebody just said shut up and do it, we grew up to shut up and do it. And when we were told to shut up and do it, we did it. We didn't raise the young men and women that are serving in our military today, and I say that because I raised my son and he serves in the military. A lot of you have sons and daughters that are in the military. We absolutely didn't raise these young men and women to just take that on faith. We taught them, taught them, gave them the confidence to say ask why. Understand why you're doing what you're doing. And now we bring them into our military and say well don't do that. Just do it.

We need to ask why so they understand and they'll be better able to do it. I promise you, even if they don't like the idea they'll do it. But that's what they need. And that's just this part about leadership, it's this part about empowerment.

We can't say we're interested in what's on your mind and then when you start talking say you know, I'm really not interested in what you have to say. Right? You can't have it both ways. And I think you're seeing us evolve in the way that you are, when you look at things the way we are today in the military and how far I can say we've come in the 30 years that I've been putting this uniform on, you couldn't even fathom that 30 years ago that we'd be where we are today. It's because of empowerment. It's because of the value that we place on men and women that serve and what they bring to the fight.

They have so much more capacity than most of us can even contemplate being able to take in. That is the future of our Air Force when they come to the table on this.

And again, this idea of how we have made this commitment to obey those that are appointed over us, I really don't believe that's in question, and I think most of us understand the right moral compass to follow. And I absolutely know people get the right answer on the test. We put it in front of them, they know exactly which box to fill out. Now whether they live their life that way and commit themselves to that, that's a whole different discussion. That's what professionals have to continually work on. That's the culture, that's the environment that we can never allow ourselves to lapse in. We need each other to keep us in the right place. WE absolutely have to value each other to keep ourselves in the right place.

CSM Alston: So as you go [inaudible] the Air Force, empowerment is a strong word. But in order for you to empower somebody you have to have something in your reservoir to give to them to help them be empowered. Would you agree? I guess nobody's away here.

I'm just an old dumb Army guy that loves motivation. Without motivation I'm no way, and I'm no good. So General Weinstein told me if I did not motivate you all and pump you all up, then he would never invite me back here or to FE Warren again. So I need you guys to get pumped up.

So on three, can I get a loud Hooah. One, two, three --

Audience: Hooah.

CSM Alston: All right, here we go.

So in order to be a profound leader, you have to understand the individuals which you're leading. Like Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force said earlier, when we came in it really wasn't about being that inquisitive soldier or inquisitive airman. It was about being able to salute the flag and move forward. But the generation you're dealing with today is a generation that has a foundation of being inquisitive, and it's not being inquisitive to question your authority, inherent authority, enlisted members, that you have, but it's about being able to understand the total meaning of the direction which you gave them.

So what I want to ask you to do is take a moment to understand the American sons and daughters which you're trying to lead. Understand this millennium generation. Understand the generation that has a sense of obligation, this generation that has to pretty much do everything, the generation that's grown up on technology. If you fail to fit in their wheelhouse, you will not have trust from them, and leadership without trust is nothing.

So I would ask you to reach into their circle, understand their meaning, and then you'll be a profound leader. But without you understanding them, your leadership methods may fall on deaf ears.

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. Here we go.

Imagine young Johnny comes into the United States Air Force. We will take General Vander Hamm and pretend that he does not have the education or the drive or the motivation he has to become a two star general. He's just an A1C, right?

So General Vander Hamm grows up in hometown USA and he's a millennium generation individual. So as General Vander Hamm was growing up -- See, [inaudible] [purpose].

So as General Vander Hamm was growing up, dad was forced to work each and every day in order to provide the proper income for his family. But not only did dad have to work, mom also had to work in order to provide the right resources to allow young Jack here to have a great life.

So as he grows up he decides that I want to play Pop Warner football and I'm going to be the best football player on X Pop Warner team. So he runs in the house and he asks dad. Dad, dad, dad, dad, can I play Pop Warner football? Of course dad's working so hard, mom is working so hard, they would love for somebody else to have the responsibility of raising young Jack, right? So they say sure, you can play Pop Warner football.

So as a kid, here's [inaudible]. Sign him up for Pop Warner football. What is the four things he has to be prepared to pay for? Anybody know? Use of the field; number two, the uniform; number three, snacks; number four, the trophy. So he goes and he plays Pop Warner football and I'm going to tell you, sir, you were the worst player on the team. You never got to play. You never, ever, ever were involved in anything the team did. But now it's banquet time.

So the coach comes up and now it's time for him to present him with his trophy. So as the coach prepares to present him with the trophy, what do you think he tells him? You are the best football player ever. Without you, we couldn't have won anything. You were the man. You held up the team.

What are we doing here? We're giving him a sense of expectation. Regardless of what he do and how he do, he's always going to think he deserves to be told he was the best. Not only here, but now mom and dad are working so he's watching VH1 and he's watching MTV and he's watching digital satellite. Everything that he pulls from that is all about how good he is.

Then he goes to talk to his peers and as long as he's able to give his peers enough resources, what are they telling him? How good he is.

And then he decides he wants to get on Facebook, and he's Facebooking 5,000 friends that he never met. [Laughter]. Once one of his friends tells him he's not any good, what did he do? He simply ignored it.

So he's always been told how good he is. But during the course of this time he builds no relationship skills, because he's never really had to interface with anybody. Whenever mom and dad really, really, really want to discipline him or get him to do the right thing or put him on the right path, they were buying him something because they just didn't have the time. Or when they really, really, really, wanted to spend time with him, because he wanted them to spend time with him, they couldn't spend time because they had to work, they were buying him something.

So as you see, the generation we're dealing with is a generation of a [independent] individual. That's why Apple [corners] the I in their products. That's why Apple has an iPhone and an iPad and iPod because that's appealing to the generation that you're leading today. They're an individual. They

have no relationship skills, or little relationship skills, and really do not want to ever deal with competition.

Today's United States Air Force is second in suicide. You had six more suicides than you had last year the other day. The United States Navy is first in suicide. They have 13 more suicides than they had last year, year to date. The two most technical, the two most profound, the two smartest services of the entire armed forces has the lead in suicides. You have to scratch your head about that. Because you would think that would not be in their decision-making process at all. But the reason it is, is because no relationship skills.

The first time they face any type of means of conflict, they go in a shell. The other day I was inspecting the barracks at Offutt Air Force Base. I walked into the Gucci dormitories that the United States Air Force has. When I walked into that Gucci dormitory and I wanted to inspect the room of one of my STRATCOM troops, of course I walked in and they call themselves suite mates. It's not room mates, it's suite mates. So as I walked in that suite and I looked on the counter, you know you have one room here, you have one room here, and you have a common area. I looked on the counter and there was 30 day old chicken. The chicken was nasty by itself. [Laughter]. So quickly I turned to my STRATCOM member and said what is this? What do you think he said? He said it's my suite mate's. So I said did you tell your suite mate? What do you think he said? I texted. [Laughter]. He texted him because he did not want any what? [Confrontation]. And so I said what's your suite mate do? He said he texted me back in large capital letters and I ignored it.

If you don't know the generation you're dealing with, you will not be a profound leader. That generation is a generation of individuals who have little relationship skills. You don't believe me, watch this.

So here we go, he's now in the United States Air Force. He's now belonging to an institution larger than himself. He's now belonging to an institution of boundaries, an institution of guidance, an institution of one on one, face to face leadership. This is the first time [inaudible]. [Laughter].

So he tells little A1C Vander Hamm here, the real down to earth truth about his performance. He tells him you are [inaudible]. You're not doing this right, you're not doing that right, why were you late for work? What in the world is going on? You need to shape up or ship out.

How do you think A1C Vander Hamm handles this? He goes into a total state of depression.

But now [inaudible] reach out. Did he reach out to me his supervisor? Or will he reach out to his immediate supervisor? No. Can he call mom and dad to come see him? Remember, I told you about how that relationship was. Probably not. Can he hit all his 5,000 friends on Facebook and somebody's coming to your rescue? Probably not. Can he talk to his suite mate who he'll hear back from in all capital letters? Probably not.

So now we've put him in a situation where he's by himself. He's in a world where he thinks that his only way out is just to end it because he sees no light at the end of that tunnel.

If we fail as leaders to put trust in our relationship platform and understand that we're not dealing with the airman of yesterday but we're dealing with the airman of today, and we take and we transform our leadership ability so that we can reach the airmen of today and give them an opportunity to have an outlet before they make a long term decision for a short term problem like the 49 have already done, we won't need to draw down the armed forces. It will draw itself down.

CMSAF Cody: I'll close this before the Sergeant Major and I will open it up to really talking about anything you want to do. You can clearly see how the Sergeant Major's passionate about this. He's passionate about what we do, our business. He's passionate about you -- our airmen, our soldiers, our sailors, our marines and their families. And there's a lot going on.

So I think there are some great analogies in there. Everybody has to get a trophy. It's just not life in the real world. It just isn't. But certainly we have to bridge this environment that we're in because the young men and women that the Sergeant Major is talking about are the leaders of our nation. They are the leaders in our military. And we have to kind of work on that. It's something we have to work on together.

To do that, you have to do, I think the biggest emphasis that the Sergeant Major is talking about is first, you better acknowledge who they are. You're not going to make them who you are. You're not the people that came before you. You're you. And we have to work through that, I think. We're working on it in the Air Force, I think you know that.

The way we're going about moving forward with issues, getting feedback with the Airman Comprehensive Assessment I think is a real good step in the right direction. It's about having meaningful, purposeful conversations with the men and women in the service. It starts at that front line supervisor. Know who those people are. Built on mutual respect and trust. And over time we will work through all those dynamics and that bridge will start to be built and it will be very strong. And while we'll value and acknowledge each and every person that steps into our military, what they bring to the table, and they bring a tremendous amount to the table. We also have to help them develop the skills that they need. They will absolutely be necessary in the environment that we know they will operate.

This is one thing we do know. We know what environment they will need to be able to operate in. But there's a process, and we have to get through that, and it is not just continuing to push hard and we'll manage to make it through, that's okay. We owe each and every one of these sons and daughters our commitment, our respect. They have no less of a commitment to serve their country than anybody else, whether you've been in five minutes, five years, 30 years. We're all committed to doing the same thing, but we're all in different places on that continuum of service to our nation.

So it's really important that you think about this empowerment as leaders, that you think about this empowerment as a young airman just starting out. You think about it in the context of professions and how much we have to value and respect each other. Care about each other. Know about each other. And if you do that, you will create that bridge into the future, that I do believe we're capable of doing and have been doing. We just have to continue to evolve our approach in it to be successful.

So when I look back at the last year of this command, and again, it's a great opportunity to bring all these great warriors together and acknowledge the hard work that you do for your country every single day. And in certain cases it's that silent warrior because I kind of talked about this yesterday, you heard the Vice Admiral talk about it. To be honest, this isn't one of those type missions that we're going to parade across the front lines every day, and unfortunately the only time it seems to hit the front lines is when somebody wants to kind of pick at us that we somehow aren't living up to our obligations. Nothing could be further from the truth when I look at the men and women of Air Force Global Strike Command, or in STRATCOM. We're living up to our commitments.

Have we had problems? Certainly we have problems. Do we face challenges? We absolutely face challenges. There is no enterprise that doesn't. The difference about us is we will acknowledge that and we will try to get better and that's exactly what this command has been doing. Certainly we've been working on it long before the beginning of this year when we had a spike and an event that got a lot of attention. Certainly an issue that was not a representation of who you are as airmen, who you are as a command, and what you do for the nation. Not a representation at all. But certainly something we had to acknowledge and move forward from and figure out why it is.

So within this Force Improvement Program we're doing, that is all about empowerment. That is about the dialogue and understanding what does it really mean to every man and women that does this mission for the nation, and how do we move the enterprise in the right direction to [inaudible] and their families for this all volunteer professional force? But you should be really, really proud of who you are and what you do as airmen. All the service members in here.

To kind of leave a backdrop, I have a video that I show. This is important that you understand about who you are. We stand, and some of the giants of our business are here. They're real giants. They're heroes. Those who we stand on their shoulders. They're here with us today.

But there's also another group of people here today that are unlike any other generation that has come before us. Those of you that wear the uniform today. This is going to be the smallest United States Air Force by the end of January 2015, since 1947 when we became a separate branch of the service. Yet we are more globally engaged as a military than in the history of our country. You saw that conflict chart for the loss of life. An amazing thing to attach to that is the fact that while we're having the least amount of loss of life globally because of the [conflict], we're engaged in the longest sustained combat operations in the history of our country. That's because of the men and women that serve within this room. And the emphasis on that, the first time in the history of our country it's being done with an all-volunteer professional force. That's an amazing thing about you. You

and your families that are committed and willing to do this for as long as you have, despite the challenges that are out there. And you should take a great sense of pride in it.

On any given day there's always going to be somebody better than us, somebody that truly has earned the trophy. You should never forget that you are part of the world's greatest Air Force, and that is undeniable anywhere around the globe. You do that because of your commitment and your sacrifice every single day.

So it's a real honor for both the Sergeant Major and I to be with you today, to certainly partake in the events and we're really excited about this evening to see actually who just maybe prevailed. And I hear it's going to be really close, so that means while there will be some folks who don't win, everybody that brought their game here brought it at an exceptional level.